

## **Uniting Students in America (USA)**

### **An Initiative to Improve America's Global Reputation and Potential for Leadership by Providing Undergraduate Scholarships at American Colleges and Universities to Needy International Students from Developing Countries**

*Concept memorandum, June 2008*

#### **Objective**

This foreign policy initiative will employ one of America's strongest assets, its colleges and universities, to improve America's image and potential for leadership significantly in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. The Uniting Students in America (USA) program will fund 30,000 scholarships a year, improving America's image, strengthening the ability of the U.S. Government to engage in international dialogue and cooperation, and building deep relationships between Americans and citizens of other countries.

#### **Rationale**

Scientific polling shows that negative opinions towards U.S. policies and leadership have increased dramatically in the formerly colonized regions of the world since 2002. In some regions, such as the Middle East and Latin America, disagreement over particular policies is hardening into a bias against cooperation and even discussion with the United States. Such a bias has the potential to damage our economic, diplomatic, and security interests, and there are indications that it is already doing so.

Polls indicate that one of the most effective ways to improve attitudes about the United States is to educate international students at America's many fine undergraduate colleges and universities. Students' favorability ratings increase significantly, and this effect is passed along to their families and friends in their home countries. By targeting students with the potential for leadership and providing them with the full four-year American college experience at the beginning of their adult lives, the USA program will create lasting friendships, deep ties to America, and a powerful reservoir of good will and cooperation.

By bringing low-income undergraduates to America from underdeveloped countries, the USA program will complement two important contact initiatives that already exist. The Fulbright program funds exchanges of professors and graduate

students, with an emphasis on Europe; the Peace Corps sends American abroad after college. Countries such as China, Russia, France, and Britain have recognized the benefits of bringing students to their countries for study. Most already use government funds to promote their higher education system worldwide. The United States sponsors less than 3,000 international students each year, only 800 of whom are undergraduates. In contrast, the Chinese government is supporting more than 4,000 students from Africa alone every year.

### Overview

The USA program will be providing scholarships to 30,000 low-income international undergraduates with high leadership potential. USA will operate as a lasting partnership between existing offices in the Departments of State and Education and American institutions of higher education that have demonstrated excellence in educating, supporting, and integrating international undergraduates. By relying on existing offices and institutions, the USA program will create little additional bureaucracy or new overhead.

The first year will allocate seed funding for the program, providing resources, staff, and training for the State Department and its EducationUSA advising centers, as well as resources for the Department of Education to use in preparing and certifying colleges and universities as partner institutions. Also during this year, the *USA Scholarship Board*, an independent commission of distinguished American and foreign educators, will be established to oversee the program. In the second year, the program will fund the first class of 7,500 students for their freshman year, with another 7,500 being added every year. Funding for the “seed” year would be \$50 million. Starting in the second year, \$250 million would be added every year to until total funding reaches a steady \$1 billion in the fourth year. Funding will come from the international affairs (150) function. The authorizations would be provided beginning with the FY 2009 budget.

The USA board will choose as partner institutions accredited colleges and universities that can demonstrate the capacity to educate and handle logistics for international students. Each year, any two or four-year college or university in the United States may respond to a Department of Education “Request for Proposal,” approved by the Board and widely advertised by the Department of Education, to be certified by the USA program as a partner institution for a five-year period.

Given the diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds of the USA students, institutions which educate large numbers of international or low-income students,

as well as Native Americans and Americans of Black, Hispanic, and Asian descent, are particularly encouraged to apply for partnership, and will be particularly targeted in advertising and outreach.

Institutions that fall under Titles III and V of the Higher Education Act (which serve historically-disadvantaged populations) that in their own opinion or in the opinion of the board require additional support services to enhance their capacity may apply for two-year support grants and be temporarily designated as partners for that period.

For the international students, the USA program will consist of three phases: **recruitment**, **education**, and an **alumni network**.

**Recruitment** will be coordinated through State Department embassies and EducationUSA centers. The centers will promote the program through high schools and other appropriate venues in foreign countries. **Education** will be exclusively provided by American partner institutions. In return for a single annual grant per student of up to \$30,000, the partner institutions will handle all admissions, travel, preparation, counseling, living, summer internships, and cultural activities, just as they do for their current international students. An **alumni network** will be maintained by the EducationUSA offices to keep graduates in touch with each other, with their American friends, and with activities sponsored by the U.S. Embassy, including recruitment of new classes.

### **Phase 1: Recruitment**

EducationUSA is a recently-established network of more than 450 advising centers in U.S. embassies and consulates that are supported by the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Their primary purpose is to attract students to American higher education. These centers will be upgraded and used as outreach points to promote the opportunity for students to compete for USA scholarships. The Bureau would also be provided with additional resources for a small unit in Washington to implement the USA program and support the Board.

Once the EducationUSA centers are fully upgraded, their staff will undertake a promotional campaign to attract qualified candidates to the USA Scholarship program. The campaign will be directed towards high school principals, college counselors, and community leaders. Interested students will be counseled on how to apply directly to American partner institutions that interest them, which will

review the applications without a fee. Applicants will also be encouraged to apply to a local university, in case they do not win the competition.

Once a student is accepted by one or more U.S. colleges and universities, the student will apply for a USA Scholarship. As in the Fulbright program, a twelve member commission, the *USA Scholarship Board*, will formulate the policies, procedures, and selection criteria for the program. The board will also choose the winning students, based on their potential for achievement and leadership, from applications that the EducationUSA staff forward.

The USA Scholarship Board will also ensure that the 7,500 new four-year scholarships granted annually through the USA program will be divided roughly equally between sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Each country would be allocated its share, by population, of the available scholarships for its region. For example, sub-Saharan Africa would receive 1,875 scholarships each year and Malawi has 1.7 percent of the population of sub-Saharan Africa, so Malawi would be allocated 33 scholarships. Further, the board will work towards achieving a balance of students that reflect the social demographics of sending countries by considering characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, region, and religion.

To be eligible for a USA scholarship, students must show that they are from a family who is not otherwise able to pay for an American education. The students will be required to obtain a visa for their study that will ensure they leave the United States upon graduation for a period of at least two years.

## **Phase 2: Education**

At the 2006 State Department Presidents' Summit, 120 university presidents and President Bush agreed to promote international study at American institutions. In keeping with this agreement, the USA program will develop lasting partnerships with accredited institutions that have already demonstrated excellence in educating and handling logistics for international students. Each year, any two or four-year college or university in the United States may respond to the State Department's "Request for Proposal" to join as a partner institution. Given the diverse ethnic background of the applicants, institutions that already enroll a large number of international students, as well as Native Americans and Americans of Black, Hispanic, and Asian descent, will be encouraged and assisted to become partners.

The programmatic criteria for qualifying as a partner institution will be reviewed every three years by the USA Scholarship Board. Title III and V institutions may apply for two-year support grants and be temporarily designated as partners.

The partner colleges and universities will receive a single payment of up to \$30,000 for tuition and administrative costs for each student they enroll each year. In return, they will handle all administrative and educational needs of the students from their first flight here to their last flight home. Each partner institution will be required to submit to the USA Scholarship Board a report that details funding spent on each student. Any funding the school does not spend will be reallocated into the program. Funds will be provided directly to the partner institutions rather than to the students, just as in existing federal financial assistance programs. The partner institution will then disburse funds to students for books, pocket money, living expenses, and travel.

The partner institutions will arrange for students to live among the general student body. This may take the form of a shared suite in a dormitory, a specialized living body, a fraternity or sorority, or a rental house. If the institution has a host family program for international students, the USA students would be included. The living arrangements may vary, but the purpose is to have international students live side-by-side and visit at home with Americans to promote interaction, rather than to be isolated as a separate group. There will be no restrictions on the USA student's academic field of study while in America. The partner institutions will be encouraged to collaborate in organizing internships or educational travel.

Ensuring that the students are prepared in English and study skills will be the responsibility of the partner institution. Under the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), students are the best tracked foreign visitors in the United States. SEVIS will track USA students throughout the duration of their approved participation in the American education system.

### **Phase 3: Alumni Network**

An important goal of the program is to foster enduring relationships between the students and their American and international friends. While the alumni offices of the partner institutions will undertake their own efforts, the EducationUSA office in each country will maintain a network that will link all the alumni in a country not just with their friends from college, but with each other. The office will use an electronic network, sponsor events and speakers, and hold video-conferences for

alumni with their American friends. These activities could be integrated into similar ones already underway for alumni of the Fulbright program.

### **Budget**

After the \$50 million investment in the “seed” year, the program budget will start at \$250 million in FY 2010 and increase by \$250 million each year until reaching the \$1 billion plateau (in real FY 2010 dollars). In order to be funded without displacing other foreign policy programs, the initiative would have to be requested by President Bush as part of the international (or “150”) function in the FY09 budget, and then become part of the regular budget request each year. The final **\$1 billion** annual appropriation at the fourth year would be broken down as follows:

Partner Institution Payments, at up to \$30,000 per student: **\$900 million**

(Tuition and fees at up to \$20,000 per student)

(Room and board at up to \$5,000 per student)

(Books, materials and incidentals at up to \$2,000 per student)

(Summer room and board for students at up to \$1,000 per student)

(School-sponsored or individual cultural travel in the United States during the year, average of \$750 per student)

(Annual travel to and from the U.S., average of \$1,250 per student)

Addition to State Department budget for central program structure and support of EducationUSA offices: **\$35 million**

Addition to Education Department budget, for support of USA program and awarding and supervision of partner payments and institutional support grants for potential partners: **\$25 million**

Addition to State Department budget for alumni operations: **\$10 million**

Discretionary fund for the Board to use for institutions and students in emergency situations or to assist in the successful operation of the program: **\$30 million**

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